

High intensity sunshine has been steaming the Shortgrass Country. Once the rain clouds finally disappeared, the heat has been unmerciful.

To celebrate the heat wave, we have been spraying cattle for horn flies. Modern cow brutes have to be cared for in a manner that would disgust a florist. 1970 model cattle can't wade in dirt tanks or roll in the dust to fight flies.

Cow experts claim that an old cow will lose 20 percent of her milk production switching her tail. I'd bet that is wrong. If these pampered old sisters weren't treated like fresh hatched laboratory specimens, they wouldn't reach the milk producing age. At the rate we are going now, cows will have to be kept in incubated stalls by 1980. I expect any day to see people start pulling stickers out of them with eyelash tweezers.

Calves are too high to be allowed out of sight of a veterinarian while spraying the cows. I was so miserable thinking of what could happen in the corrals that I had to ride off. You get to imagining one of those 40-cent steers catching a cold and you can't help longing for the days when they weren't so precious. One double size bath towel wouldn't mop up the tears if a calf broke his leg this fall. In other days, an accident like that meant fresh beef. Under this market, it means a ranchwide state of deep mourning.

Short counts have increased my apprehension. Fences were down for 10 days after the floods. Book counts are as meaningless as government budgets. Every time a bunch is counted, the buzzards manage to appear on the scene. You never know whether the missing cattle are flood victims or incurable wanderers. I tried taking sleeping pills at night, but discovered that my stomach was too nervous to dissolve them.

An hombre who joins us on the north has added to my unrest. He keeps asking over and over if I've seen one of his sister-in-law's calves. The more people there are around the louder he talks. He doesn't have the good grace to wait and ask in private.

It hasn't done a bit of good to tell him that we are too busy to check every calf that has been in the pen. Brand inspectors are supposed to do that kind of work. Herders have a hard enough time finding their spurs. I lose my hat every day at dinner. He's done enough cowboying to know that much.

Besides that, the Good Book says to be your brother's keeper. It doesn't say one word about looking after other folks' sister-in-law's cattle. A long time ago, he got the habit of throwing his cattle out of our pasture. He must think that his whole family has the same privilege.

No troubles have developed that the rains won't heal. Horn flies and suspicious neighbors are annoying, but they won't match a sneak preview of a small scale drouth.

Outlanders who have never seen the Shortgrass Country on a grass boom cannot imagine how beautiful it is. Dews fall each morning. Horses hooves break wild mint into a fragrance that is far removed from the smog of the cities. Fawns and wild turkey range far from their natural haunts. Mother quail gain new voice to bark to their babies. Best of all the grass grows over the roads and covers the depredation of the dry spell.

Good times are bound to be ahead of us. The chances of going broke on a good market backed by plenty of grass seem mighty slim.